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ABSTRACT

Findings from an interdisciplinary research project, Methods of Analyzing Samples of Elicited Discourse in English and Spanish for Determining Student Language Proficiency, are presented. The research project was designed to develop a unified framework for the analysis of audiotaped discourse samples elicited from Spanish/English bilingual students that is directly applicable to assessing oral language proficiency. The framework for analysis integrated and applied recent research in a variety of fields including sociolinguistics, language acquisition, developmental pragmatics, the ethnography of communication, and the philosophy of language. The paper summarizes information about the linguistic features, interactional communicative strategies, and discourse structures used by kindergarten through grade 5 students in conversation with an adult interlocutor and when telling narratives from wordless books. Criteria distinguishing communicative strategies used by students displaying a range of proficiency from high to low are described in terms of multiple co-occuring variables across lexical, clause, prosodic, and discourse levels. As elicitors' discourse styles strongly influenced the complexity and coherence of language produced by students, criteria were developed to describe and evaluate the quality of the elicitation process. Problems and recommendations in the application of a sociolinguistic discourse analysis approach

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A Sociolinguistic-Discourse Alternative for Language Proficiency Assessment*

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PREFACE

This paper summarizes findings from an interdisciplinary research project, Methods of Analyzing Samples of Elicited Discourse in English and Spanish for Determining Student Language Proficiency. The research project was designed to develop a unified framework for the analysis of audiotaped discourse samples elicited from Spanish/English bilingual students that is directly applicable to assessing oral language proficiency. The framework for analysis integrated and applied recent research in a variety of fields including sociolinguistics, language acquisition, developmental pragmatics, the ethnography of communication and the philosophy of language. The paper summarizes information about the linguistic features, interactional communicative strategies, and discourse structures used by kindergarten through grade five students in conversation with an adult interlocutor and when telling narratives from wordless books. Criteria distinguishing communicative strategies used by students displaying a range of proficiency from high to low are described in terms of multiple co-occuring variables across lexical, clause, prosodic and discourse levels. As elicitors' discourse styles strongly influenced the complexity and coherence of language produced by students, criteria was developed to describe and evaluate the quality of the elicitation process. Problems and recommendations in the application of a sociolinguistic discourse analysis approach to language proficiency assessment in school districts is discussed.

The research project was the result of a collaborative effort between Helen Slaughter, Department of Legal and Research Services, Tucson Unified School District and Adrian Bennett who was in the Department of Anthropology, University of Kentucky during 1980-81 and is now at Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos in New York City. Helen Slaughter assumed major responsibility for the final chapter (VII) on a Sociolinguistic Discourse Alternative for Language Proficiency Assessment, which forms the basis of this report. Adrian Bennett wrote the initial framework for Analysis of Elicited Discourse Samples upon which the research was based. Analyses and transcripts of students' Spanish discourse, based on applications of the framework, written by Olivia Arrieta, Otto Santa Ana-A and Betty Garcia, were instrumental in conducting the research project.

A Sociolinguistic-Discourse Alternative for Language Proficiency Assessment

This research has been a pioneering attempt to base language proficiency assessment in a theory of communication as human interaction. Language proficiency was defined as communicative competence and, following Hymes (1972), the data of communicative competence was viewed as the interaction of language and social settings. A distinctive feature of this approach was a deliberate focus upon context, and the way students as well as adult examiners created the interactional and linguistic context, rather than presupposing context as a given. The following discussion will summarize some of the major points of the study and relate them to practical requirements of language proficiency assessment in school districts. The advantages and disadvantages of a sociolinguistic approach to assessment will be detailed as well as recommendations for further research.

Direct Measurement of Speaking and Listening in A Naturalistic Context

In this study an attempt was made to simulate, as nearly as possible, an assessment situation in which the student's communicative competencies could be evaluated on the basis of the way speaking and listening function in ordinary social contexts. Discourse was elicited from students in an oral language interview during which an adult examiner engaged the student in conversation and encouraged him/her to talk freely upon several topics mutually arrived at between the two during the course of the conversation. Conversational elicitation was followed by asking the student to tell a story from a wordless picture book after the student had been given the chance to look through the book to discover the story sequence. The elicitation procedure, conversation and story-telling task, was first attempted in the minority and/or home language, i.e., Spanish, followed by an elicitation in English. Different but similar wordless books (Mercer and Marianna Mayer), were used in the Spanish and English elicitations.

These procedures, by placing the student into an interactive, speaker-listener role, constitute a direct measure of communicative proficiencies or competencies where the multifaceted, synchronous aspects of oral communication, (i.e., semantic, syntatic, lexical, prosodic and pragmatic), can be exhibited and analyzed. Wallat and Green (1980) describing the sociolinguistic constructs underlying the study of communicative competence state that the various aspects of communication cannot be understood in isolation from one another because "these features are not separate cues to meaning; rather, they occur in varying combinations and provide a degree of redundancy for message interpretation."

A student's ability to interpret and provide various communicative cues co-ocurring within a context created during a conversational interview is a broader view of competency or proficiency than found in other, more indirect approaches to language assessment. Indirect measures of language out of context, such as sentence repetition tasks or multiple choice tests of grammatical correctness, may produce results that falsely suggest a student knows how and when to use a form s/he cannot use or conversely that s/he cannot produce a structure when required to in other social contexts.

Language acquisition researchers also have often tested the acquisition of complex structures under experimental conditions that have placed children in an artificial situation where the normal contextual and paralinguistics cues accompanying speech have been removed. This has lead some researchers to question the validity and generalizability of knowledge of language acquisition based upon this so called scientific research tradition (Karmeloff-Smith, 1979). Furthermore, indirect measures of language competency assume a single standard "language," rather than recognizing functionally proficient dialectal variations, and assume a shared, but unspoken, background understanding of the demands of the assessment task that may not be valid in testing linguistic minority students. Comparative psychologists (Cole and Means, 1981) have shown there are marked cultural differences in subjects perceptions of psychological tasks but that performance differences seem to disappear when supporting contexts are provided.

The elicitation of conversation and narrative discourse can be viewed as midway between an ethnographic-sociolinguistic study of spontaneous speech produced in a variety of interactional situations and more highly structured and indirect measures of specific linguistic abilities. Spontaneous speech in natural social contexts has often been used by sociolinguists and other linguists to study language proficiencies and/or more broadly conceived communicative competencies of a small sample of children. Some measurement specialists in education have also considered spontaneous speech samples to be "the most suitable method for evaluating which morphological and syntactic rules and structures the child has learned readily in his language," (Wiig and Semel, 1980, p. 97) however, they also view the disadvantages of this method of basing even clinical judgments about students language proficiencies to be overwhelming in terms of size of language sample needed, difficulty of collecting data, and complexity and time required in analysis. The use of an elicitation strategy to obtain audiotaped data upon which to directly base judgments of language proficiency was mentioned by Rosansky (1980) in her suggestion that modifications of the Foreign Service Institute Oral Language Interview Test for determining language

proficiency might be useful in school district assessment programs. There is also a growing recognition among test developers that speaking and listening skills should be tested directly under performance conditions requiring students to demonstrate their skills (NWREL, 1980).

The question then of whether and how well this situation can be said to represent a naturalistic context for assessing communicative competency must be addressed. The analysis of conversational data from this study has suggested that several different types of "contexts" may result from the interaction of an adult and a student during an oral language interview. These different contexts, i.e., examination, interview or conversation, appear to have a marked influence upon the level and quality of discourse elicited from students, especially that of younger and/or less proficient students. A conversational context where the student is encouraged to engage in mutually established topics of conversation with the adult, and where the adult builds upon the students responses, appears optimal for eliciting discourse. Conversely, an examination sequence, described by Mehan (1979) as a repetitive initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) pattern, tended to result in more sparce discourse production, especially in the younger age ranges, e.g. five to seven years old.

An adult-child interrogation pattern was also found to result in sparce child discourse samples by Sulzby (1981, p. 84) in a study of Kindergarten students from highly literate home backgrounds. Some students, especially older students, elaborated upon topics after single or "first" questions, which indicated that an interview pattern of initial open-ended question and follow-up question would suffice to elicit an adequate discourse sample in these cases. A few students, perhaps perceiving that the purpose of the "game," was for them to talk in an elaborated way, responded with extended discourse to questions that would have been given yes/no answers by other students. In other words, some students needed little in the way of background decontextualization from the examiner in order to elaborate upon topics while others only gave elaborated responses or even clause responses after the examiner had interacted conversationally with them over a number of turns on one or several topics. In the latter cases, the examiner must use questions and other utterances such as comments on the topic, that are situated in the ongoing conversational discourse (Cook-Gumperz, 1977). One indicator of the 'naturalness' of the assessment context is the use of situated elicitations similar to natural conversation rather than a standard set of interview questions in an assessment process.

The question of the relevance of an individual adult-child interview context outside of the classroom to within classroom and other socially valued contexts is an important one and one that we intend to pursue in future research. Some classroom communicative competencies, such as getting a turn, are not measured in this one-to-one context while others, such as holding the floor and knowing what and how much to say to whom are interpreted differently in a one-to-one adult/child conversational context than in a classroom context. However, we suspect future research would show that the student's ability to actively participate in and sustain a conversation with an adult teacher-examiner would be directly related to his or her ability to communicate with teachers in classroom discourse. Also, the ability to use discourse strategies to build a narrative text appears to be an important aspect of proficiency in language use as it is encountered in schools in developing literacy skills. In their discussion of communicative competence in the classroom, Wallat and Green (1980) stated, "We still have not decided. . . whether we can realistically continue to assume that an ideal instructional situation and ideal speech situation exists." Certainly, there are few opportunities for students to demonstrate productive communicative competencies in some classrooms. Mace-Matluck et al. (1981) found that bilingual students' language in the classroom was sparce when compared to that of their playground and home interactions. The authors concluded that the students had few opportunities to engage in extended discourse within the bilingual classroom. Therefore, an individual assessment situation may provide a much greater opportunity for students to display an optimal level of competency than does the typical classroom setting.

A more important issue is whether children are required to talk about topics such as helping at home or how to play a game in naturally occuring speech in contexts other than the assessment situation. What are the topics that are familiar to students and which would they be likely to initiate in naturally occuring conversations with adults, both within and outside of classroom contexts? More research is needed in this area.

Assessing Communicative Competencies: Criteria for Evaluation

This study and the methods of analysis recommended in it for assessment were based upon a definition of language proficiency as communicative competence, in a variety of interactional contexts. Judgments of proficiency were seen to be based upon judgments of communicative intent. The units of analysis used for evaluating communicative competency are of the utmost importance in conclusions reached about what proficiency entails and also about the performance level of individual students. Two distinct, but overlapping, units of analysis, (1) interaction and (2) oral

discourse, formed the basis of the methods of analyzing elicited discourse developed within the course of this study. Both of these foci for analyzing language proficiency are relatively unique in terms of prevailing assessment methods used in education.

Language testing has generally been based upon methods that removed or standardize "out" meaningful conversational interaction between an examiner and student. As one example, of which there are many, in the Oral Language Evaluation (OLE) test (Silvaroli, 1975) students were asked to talk about a picture and examiners are adjured not to provide any more cues to the student. The analysis following the OLE test was based entirely upon syntactic structure with the assumption presumably made that the interactional variables are unimportant since the situation has been 'neutralized.' Other test developers have attempted to eliminate interactional variables in the belief that to include them would create a haphazard and 'uncontrolled' or 'unscientific' assessment context and also produce insuperable problems for analysis and evaluation (Wiig and Semel, 1979). In our research we have taken the position that in order to be valid, oral language assessment must take place in a meaningful communication context where normal communicative cues are provided and that the resulting interactional variables can be systematically analyzed and integrated into evaluations of student communicative competencies.

Few language proficiency measures have focused upon discourse or the larger units of meaning beyond the sentence level. In this study we have developed methods for analyzing (1) interactive discourse that occurs between conversational participants where linguistic context, i.e., previous utterances, are important to interpretation, (2) extended or elaborated discourse on conversational topics and (3) narratives told about stories in wordless books. The ability to produce coherent, extended discourse is an important characteristic in distinguishing between students who are proficient in a language and those who are not. The methods for analyzing both interactional and discourse proficiencies were discussed in the full report. Suggestions for the application of this research to language proficiency assessment are given below.

Interactional Proficiencies. There were a number of interactional proficiencies exhibited by students during the conversation and narrative elicitation that contributed to the development, maintanence and direction of the interactional situation and information conveyed. These included the often unnoticed elements of appropriate backchannel feedback to the speaker and the prosodic patterning of responses as well as the more obvious conversational clarification strategies to be detailed below. We paid particular attention to the conversational context as negotiated between student and adult interlocutor rather than simply focusing upon student responses to the examiner. A

theoretical discussion of a socially active notion of context is found in "Context in Children's Speech" by Jenny Cook-Gumperz and John J. Gumperz (1975). In order to focus upon the mutual development of context between examiner and student, it became necessary to consider larger segments of discourse in making judgments about proficiency. In other words, the focus must be upon discourse level units of analysis which may contain a number of turns between examiner and student rather than a focus upon clausal level units or one examiner/student response intervals.

The list of interactional proficiencies given below were those, derived from the data, that appeared to contribute to the comprehensibility of the conversation and that indicated student's growing awareness of his/her role as a conversational partner. We omit from this section the discussion those semantic/pragmatic elements such as background information that will be part of the discussion of discourse proficiencies.

Many of these interactional proficiencies are context-bound in that they can only be expected to appear in some conversational contexts and not others. For instance, an important skill is the detection and negotiated repair of misunderstandings occuring during the course of a conversation since such misunderstandings are not uncommon in naturally occuring speech and if undetected tend to break down communication. However, in some conversations, including many in our sample, misunderstandings did not occur and therefore the skill of negotiating a misunderstanding could not be observed. Also if misunderstandings occurred constantly this might be a sign of lack of proficiency. We feel that in evaluation it is important to distinguish between interactional behaviors sustaining or improving communication and those impairing communication. Also we hypothesize that clusters containing more instances and varieties of interactional proficiencies will be more descriptive of proficient students than of limited or less proficient students. In other words, a particular behavior may not occur but some cluster of interactional skills will be observed in more proficient students. In our data we observed a trend of more instances and varieties of interactional proficiencies in older students.

Interactional proficiencies observable in audiotaped student discourse are as follows:

Responses

Responses to elicitations were semantically, syntactially and pragmatically appropriate.

Clarifications were provided when student was asked questions about what he/she was talking.

Prosody

Prosodic features, i.e., pitch, rhythm, loudness, were synchronous with ongoing interactional context, (e.g. pauses between/within utterances were within range expected of competent speaker of the language).

Used prosody for conveying relationships between different parts of the discourse (e.g. linking, contrasting, highlighting).

Monitoring

Detected and corrected examiner misunderstandings.

Asked the examiner for clarification of task.

Elicited an evaluation from examiner.

Asked whether or not the examiner understood what s/he said.

Commented upon or made asides about what s/he was talking about.

Qualified or self-corrected information previously given.

Monitored speech resulting in improved communication by repairing or editing utterances.

Negotiated/Constructed the Context

Successfully shifted topic of conversation.

Used strategy of digressing from topic.

Initiated topic of conversation.

Changed registers, as in switching from a conversational to a narrative style or reducing/increasing the formality of the interaction.

Made conversational intentions explicit, such as relating what was said to knowledge/experiences assumed to be shared with listener or in the listener's experience.

Within the body of this report we have emphasized the importance of the role taken by the adult in eliciting language from students for language proficiency assessment. Student language proficiency cannot be evaluated without also evaluating examiner competencies in interacting with students. The adult plays a dominant role in conveying the communicative intentions established during the assessment procedures. Linguistic minority students may not always share the same perception of communicative interactions with the examiner, even when they are both from the same ethnic

background. For instance, some Hispanic children may assume that standards of respect and politeness call for brief responses to questions while others may assume that more elaboration is expected. We recommend that examiners be trained in strategies for providing more explicit cues regarding the social and linguistic context to students who may be unfamiliar with the 'educator' expectations of the assessment context.

Since the influence of the examiner upon language samples elicited from students is of fundamental importance to subsequent evaluations, it is suggested that the quality of the examiner's performance be evaluated previous to evaluating a student's language proficiency. Table 1 shows a format being considered by the school district based upon this research for inclusion as part of the scoring system for the Language Proficiency Measure.

Discourse Proficiencies. The discourse features listed below are those which have been found in this study to be central in judgments of the language proficiency or communicative competency of linguistic minority students. While the interactional context, and thus, the opportunity or probability of these features occurring may be different in the conversational and wordless book tasks, these features are important in the assessment of elicited discourse samples from both tasks. Expected differences in performance due to task and age or acquisitional level will be discussed. The features are:

1. Coherence/Comprehensibility of Utterances,
2. Appropriateness and/or Negotiated Context of Utterances,
3. Complementarity as a Conversational Partner and Ability to Produce Extended or Elaborated Discouse,
4. Effective Use of Prosody,
5. Provision of Adequate Background Information Prior to Point Making,
6. Completness of Information,
7. Richness or Complexity,
8. Flexibility and Range of Communicative Competencies,
9. Pointmaking and Highlighting,
10. Summarizing/Synthesizing, and
11. Verb Tenses in Narrative Discourse.

While these features may overlap in varying degrees in specific instances, each will be discussed separately.

1. Coherence/Comprehensibility of Utterances. The most important feature of students language is to determine whether and how much meaning is communicated to the listener. A focus on comprehensibility, especially when assisted in this interpretation by persons familiar both with children's language and with the communication styles of the ethnic minority community, provides

TABLE 1

VALIDATION OF ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

Tape No._____ Analyst_____

Quality of Recording: ____easy to hear ____difficult to hear

Quality of Examiner's Performance:

1. Generally, the examiner elicited conversation from the student by which method?
   ___examination ___interview ___cooperative conversation

2. Did the examiner allow the student time to respond to the topic(s)?
   ____often ____sometimes ____rarely

3. Did the examiner's responses to the student indicate s/he understood what the student said?
   ____often ____sometimes ____rarely

4. Did the examiner build on the student's utterances?
   ____often ____sometimes ____rarely

5. Did the examiner abruptly change topics?
   ____often ____sometimes ____rarely

6. Did the examiner elicit a narrative from the wordless book by saying, "Tell me a story ..."?
   ____yes ____no

7. Did the examiner attempt at least one descriptive and one explanation-type topic and also a narrative from the wordless book?
   ____yes ____no

   If so, what was missing?

Students Whose Discourse was Difficult to Elicit:

8. If the student tended to respond with "close down" strategies, e.g., "I don't know, that's all," did the examiner repeat or redirect the questions?
   ____often ____sometimes ____rarely ___not applicable

9. If the student was reluctant to talk, did the examiner attempt to elicit language by providing context or background information to the student?
   ____often ____sometimes ____rarely ___not applicable

10. In the beginning of the wordless book, did the examiner provide additional probes to clarify the task?
    ____yes ____no ____not applicable

Summary of Quality of Examiner's Performance:

____excellent ____adequate ____inadequate

a basis for language proficiency assessment where dialectal variations and communicative intent can be considered when making judgments about proficiency. The comprehensibility or sense-making aspect of the students language is fundamental to further and more detailed descriptions of proficiency. It is the point of departure for discourse analysts. In interpreting the language of young bilingual children especially it is important that analysts be knowledgeable about the characteristics of child language and the cultural background of students.

2. Appropriateness and/or Negotiated Context of Utterances. Judgments of language proficiency will include judgments about whether or not the students utterances are appropriate in terms of semantic and pragmatic context. Such features as whether the student stays on the same topic as the examiner, selects an appropriate register in terms of formality, informality dimensions or genre, and selects the 'right' sort of thing to talk about, will affect judgments of proficiency. Black's (1979) scale for rating young children's communicative competencies in the classroom contained items regarding appropriateness such as the child's ability to vary responses according to conversational topic.

The range of utterances accepted as appropriate will be much broader in a sociolinguistic discourse approach to assessment than those accepted in other types of language assessment, especially that of discrete item tests. This is partly because the student has an opportunity to construct the context as well as respond to the adults utterances during the interaction. We recognize a variety of ways conversations can be meaningful, including explicitly shifting or changing topics of conversation and we recognize that there are a wide range of forms narratives can take.

3. Complementarity as a Conversational Partner and Ability to Produce Extended or Elaborated Discourse. The model suggested by this approach to language proficiency assessment is based on the recognition that competencies in face-to-face communication are central to issues of language proficiency assessment. In assessing proficiency, data must be obtained indicating that the student can effectively interact as a conversational partner over a number of turns. (Indicators of proficiency during conversational interaction were listed previously.) We have also indicated that the ability to talk at length which we have very minimally defined as turns of talk of 3 or more clauses, is essential to demonstrating proficiency. Indeed, the wordless book task, was included in the assessment procedures partly because it provided a device for encouraging extended talk. Recognizing that students might have varying skills in producing extended talk due to topic or genre differences we have suggested that examiners attempt to elicit

elaborated responses about (1) a process of doing or making something, (2) narratives of personal or vicarious, i.e., TV, experiences, and (3) narratives from a wordless book. We also suggest that because the linguistic context, i.e., the influence of preceding examiner utterances on the content and style of students discourse, is different in interactive and extended discourse, that these differences be considered in evaluation.

In summary, in analyzing student discourse we determine whether the students can effectively take the role of a conversational partner and whether or not the student elaborates on topics or builds a narrative text.

4. Effective Use of Prosody. The importance of effective prosodic patterning has already been mentioned in the previous section as important in terms of the student's proficiency as an interactant with others. Effective communication involves the ability to manipulate and monitor multiple levels of co-occuring variables in a stream of discourse which has a melodic and rhythmic, as well as a grammatical and lexical organization (Bennett, 1980). Prosodic features are not a separate feature, but involve an intricate interplay with cues from semantic, lexical and syntactic systems. Misleading, exaggerated or reduced prosodic cues are possible causes of miscommunication. Prosody is used to establish relations across the discourse, as for example, when rising intonation at the end of a tone group serves to hold the floor and implies that more is going to be said, or when stress placed on certain words serves to highlight certain information or parts of the discourse.

5. Provision of Adequate Background Information Prior to Point Making. The provision of background information, i.e., who, what, where, when, why and how, in elaborating upon a topic or in building a narrative text varied widely between the more highly proficient and less proficient students and among grade-age levels. Younger students and less proficient older students tended to relate sequences of activities during elaborated discourse without providing specific information about who was involved or the circumstances under which the activities took place. When questioned by the examiner, these students could usually supply the information; however, it wasn't volunteered and/or placed at the beginning of an extended discourse segment as seen in the data of older or more proficient students. A study by Menig-Peterson and McCabe (1978) indicated that older children tended to cluster orientating or background information at the beginning of their narratives and used more background clauses than did the younger students from whom many of the background clauses were elicited directly from the examiner. It should be noted that some of the more proficient younger students provided more explicit background clauses than the less

proficient older students and they sometimes directly questioned the examiner to check on the degree of shared knowledge between themselves and the listener. A higher percentage of clauses to total clauses are spent in providing background information by older students.

One feature of background contextualization or topicalization that appears to be related to developmental/acquisitional stage was the nonspecific use of pronouns, what Piaget called the overuse of pronouns, in young children's discourse. It was not unusual for young children, e.g. Kindergarten and Grade 1, to use pronouns in a narrative or description without first specifying their reference. When this happened it was difficult to interpret who the child was referring to without questioning him/her or without direct access to the book itself. Nonspecific reference in narratives from the wordless book gave the stories an unplanned and incoherent quality. This occurred both in conversational discourse where the listener presumably did not share the context and in the wordless book where the child may have assumed that the adult did share the context as the book itself was usually visible to both. King and Rentel (1981) found that children's economy and precision of pronoun reference increased sharply between Grades 1 and 2. We would expect a greater precision in use of reference for older students but in younger students overuse of pronouns with nonspecified referents would not indicate a lack of proficiency.

6. Completeness of Information. In elaborating about how to make or do something or telling narratives, one indication of proficiency is that the topic or narrative is adequately described. While there are wide variations in the amount of detail any one speaker might include in talking about a subject, yet at a very minimum a description or story requires depiction of a beginning, middle and end. We provided a model for analyzing the structure of descriptions about how a game is played (Chapter IV) and models for analyzing the episodic structures found in the wordless story books used in the study (Chapter V). When a child's discourse was somewhat incoherent, we found it was sometimes useful to refer to these models to understand how missing pieces of information might be related to lack of coherence. Elements related to richness or complexity, and pointmaking discussed below are also aspects of completness of information. Moreover, completness of information can be conceptualized in various ways. The two that were important in the analysis of the data samples in this study were ennumeration or description and summarizing or synthesis of information. This is not to deny that all description is highly selective of aspects included in discourse.

7. Richness and Complexity of Interclausal Relations. More proficient students used discourse that was rich in semantic complexity. This involved selection among alternate words where choices were readily available and the use of a repertoire of various syntactic strategies for relating clauses to show complex relations. Originality was also discussed as adding to the richness and was observed in some of the student narratives. Original means that some aspect of the narrative is unusual, unexpected, surprising, in such a way that this original aspect can be seen to fit with/or be integrated with other parts of the story and thereby appears to be a result of the narrator's intentions rather than accidental. The use of the same wordless books across students in the assessment provided an opportunity to notice originality in some of the narratives. Examples of complex semantic relations were cause-effect, event-consequences, motive-actions and event-human response. The integration of a variety of these semantic relations within discourse on a topic or in constructing a narrative text was observed in the discourse of more highly proficient students. The more proficient students also used a variety of different connectors including in addition to 'and' and 'and then' subordinating conjunctions to introduce adverb clauses and make it clear exactly what the relation was between clauses. Adverbial clauses were much more apparent in the conversational data than the use of adjectival clauses although some use of adjectival clauses was noted among older students. The students use of subordinate adverbial clauses is compatible with findings in Loban's (1976) language development research but their infrequent use of adjectival clauses may indicate a relatively low level of language development in this research sample. However, this is suggestive only and in need of further research as it is problematic to compare findings from two studies using widely different research methodologies. (Richness was discussed in detail in Chapter V, Narrative).

8. Flexibility and Range of Communicative Competencies. More proficient students were able to vary the communicative strategies they used to interact in the conversational situation and also demonstrated command of more different types of strategies, such as making topic shifts explicit, qualifying statements, etc., than less proficienct students. They were also more likely to shift to a narrative style when appropriate.

9. Pointmaking and Highlighting. More proficient students were more likely to be clear about the point they were making in their talk and provided more highlighting emphasizing important events or factors in their descriptions or narratives. It was often difficult to discern any point or major emphasis in the discourse of less proficient students and they were less likely to make foreground-background relations explicit. In other

words, it was more difficult to discern the communicative intent of utterances from less proficient students.

10. Summarizing/Synthesizing. The ability to summarize or synthesize information at a more abstract level than that of ennumeration or description of sequences of actions was viewed as an important proficiency that appeared in the discourse of some older students. By summarizing, a speaker is able to convey information in a relatively refined and condensed fashion and may be able to ascertain the needs or interests of the listener before going into a more detailed description. Summaries also are economical ways of establishing a shared context before engaging in speech for other purposes, e.g. to give opinions, provide an evaluation or make comments. Summarizing may also be a more appropriate response when the speaker can assume a shared general knowledge background with the listener.

11. Verb Tenses in Narrative Discourse. As stated previously, ranges of discourse proficiency are described in terms of multiple co-ocurring variables across lexical, semantic, syntactic, and prosodic systems. Structure, e.g. tense, can't be evaluated in isolation from its meaning in discourse. This was best seen in variations in strategies students used to produce a narrative text from the wordless books. More highly proficient students distinguished foreground from background information by switching tenses. In other words, a change in verb tense signalled a change in meaning. Less proficient students, while using tenses correctly in terms of semantic meaning at the clause level, did not use verb tenses consistently or flexibly to enhance the meaning of their narratives. The inconsistent and seemingly haphazard use of verb tense by the less proficient students seemed unrelated to the story line and thus was confusing to the listener.

Further complicating this issue,is the fact that one can't tell the function of a clause from its tense. In analyzing student narratives from the wordless books it became apparent that the function of a clause, e.g. background orientation or event sequence, could only be discerned from examining the narrative context in which it occurred. This was discussed at length in the chapters on narratives.

Relating Judgments of Language Proficiency to Judgments of Communicative Intent

A. The general point needs to be made that judgments of language proficiency are based on understanding of communicative intent.

Communicative intent involves an understanding of:

1. The referential world of the discourse. This is the part of meaning closest to information theorists' idea of language as a system for communicating "information", or Locke's view that it communicates "ideas". However, our meaning of this is essentially different because of the importance of the contingency of this referential world being built up by the discourse. It is contingent first of all on shared assumptions and social practices, particularly communicative practices. That means it is contingent on the "negotiation" of meanings and intentions in the interaction. And in addition, creating a referential world within which things can be talked about "sensibly" or "coherently" is dependent on shared cultural ideas. What competent topic talk and/or narrative depends on is the use of particular strategies for establishing a sharedness within which a story can be constructed or a topic discussed. The strategies themselves only work if in fact they are already familiar to the interlocutors. Using a familiar strategy makes it possible for a listener to know where you're coming from. The elevator example of 310B-5-F is a good example of how the child relies on knowledge of a widely-known event schema (riding in an elevator) and effectively ties her reaction to the schema by making that reaction explicit, leaving everything else to be inferred or assumed (such as the "cause-effect" relation between elevator speed and fear). So it is not merely a matter of providing background information, but of providing just the right amount and kind of information in just the right place to establish a shared world.

2. The point or purpose of the referential world being created (if there is one as in topic talk or narrative. Of course in greetings there is none).

When we can follow a child's discourse in every respect in terms of understanding communicative intent, we consider him or her proficient. The discourse makes sense. is coherent, has point, purpose, direction, i.e., is "rational".

B. A second point to be made is: there are varying strategies for constructing a sharable discourse world. First of all, these involve multiple levels of "behavior", linguistic prosodic, nonverbal. Within each of these realms there are again multiple means:

1. Linguistic - word choice; syntactic choice; inter-clausal relations and cohesive mechanisms (Halliday and Hasan, 1976)

2. Prosodic - stress and tonal contour; register shift; rhythm and tempo shifts.

3. Nonverbal - facial gesture; body posture and orientation; hand and arm gesture.

No single list of behaviors taken separately will tell one what kinds of communicative intent are being brought into play, or how they are. One has to look at their integration. But more than this, they have to be interpreted in the light of the ongoing, developing, contingent interactional context, and in the "larger" sociopolitical, cultural and economic life-situations of the actors.

C. Finally, given that there are different forms of discourse in the sense that there are different strategies for creating coherence, point, etc., some forms may be preferred over others. And preferences or expectations will vary for different ages, and for different social roles or persons.

Therefore, when we judge proficiency it is incumbent on us to make clear what expectations we have in terms of the forms of discourse for given ages or groups. These expectations are in fact implied in the ways examiners interacted with the children, as well as in their, and our, intuitive judgments of proficiency.

These are culturally specific expectations grounded in our own social practices, which have clearly been influenced by the demands of essayist literacy.

Examiner Training and Scoring Issues

Examiner training and scoring issues are very large, but we believe not insurmountable, obstacles to the application of a sociolinguistic discourse approach to language proficiency assessment in school districts. Ideally, a school district considering implementing this approach to assessment should be committed to an extensive inservice/retraining program for its teachers based upon current research in sociolinguistics, the

ethnography of communication and bilingual education. The experience of the school district in training bilingual teachers in the elicitation procedures used in the Language Proficiency Measure (LPM) has shown that the teacher-examiner's involvement in listening to and analyzing audiotaped data from the LPM is indispensible in training people to conduct valid elicitations. In this report, we have discussed ways in which elicitors' discourse styles strongly influences the complexity and coherence of the language produced by children. Characteristics of adult interactive discourse that provides an optimal context for student performance in a conversational role during an assessment process are similar to that found by Wells (1981) to typify the discourse style used by parents of more proficient preschool children. In quoting from a number of research studies Wells showed:

> What distinguished the speech of the mothers of the fast developers was the greater proportion of their utterances that were related to the preceding child utterances in the form of expansions and extensions of the child's contributions. Similar results have emerged from the Bristol study, with the additional finding that amount of speech is also important. (Wells, 1981, p. 115)

Several issues may be discussed briefly regarding training. First, examiners must be trained to the level where they command "clinical" interactive strategies appropriate to a variety of individual student contexts. Second, the discourse skills learned in conducting a number of LPM elicitations are quite different from the 'known answer' examination sequences observed in classroom teacher discourse. On the other hand, teacher training and sensitivity to individual differences suggest a predisposition towards acquiring these skills readily, after appropriate training. Furthermore, we suspect that this increased sensitivity to context by teachers trained in this method would increase their effectiveness as interactants in the classroom. Next, the sensitivity to cultural and ethnically distinct styles of communication of the linguistic minority group being assessed of teacher-examiners from the same ethnic background improves the assessment context. Articulation of alternatives in communication styles and selection of topics among the assessment team members enhances the probability of the cultural appropriateness of the assessment procedures. Listening to tapes and discussing various interpretations of the interactional situation and discourse elicited from students as a group is an important part of training examiners.

Scoring Issues. There is a vast difference between applying sociolinguistic-discourse analysis methods directly to samples of audiotaped and transcribed discourse as described in this report and developing scoring methods that can be used in school district assessment by nonresearchers. The district discourse analysis committee has been developing methods which are both an application and a modification of the Framework for Analysis to the analysis and scoring of student discourse from the LPM for a year and a half. As described in the endnote to Chapter II, Methods, the first attempt involved a checksheet while the second attempt resulted in a scale of three discourse variables each for both tasks, the conversation on global topics, and the narrative from the wordless book. Presently under development is a scoring system intended to provide a profile of student's proficiencies for each task and language. The profile is intended to incorporate the main findings of this research in as much as is practical in applied settings.

The following issues or questions need to be addressed in applying these methods to large scale assessment in school districts.

1. *"Practicality."* How much time can be spent in scoring one tape? Is it feasible to use a scoring technique requiring multiple replaying of tapes? How many discourse features can be coded in the scoring process while still restricting the amount of time spent on scoring any one tape? Is it possible for the same person, i.e., the examiner, to both administer and score the LPM either at the same time or at different times? If not, how is information not on the tape, e.g. nonverbal behavior, communication previous to taping, etc., going to be considered in the proficiency judgment? How much time would it take to train persons to do the analysis? What would the dollar cost and educational benefits be for a school district to conduct this kind of assessment?

2. *"Holistic vs. Specific Indicators of Proficiency."* We have recommended that a primary focus in the analysis of discourse is upon coherence or comprehensibility of longer discourse units called topics or narratives. Yet scoring involves a reduction of these wholes into something more specific which may result in the person doing the scoring losing track of meaning being communicated. In making judgments about proficiency it is important to consider the communicative strengths and weaknesses of the entire elicitation before examining specific features so that these can be evaluated within context. Coding of specific features is important, however, in constructing language profiles for feedback to teachers and curriculum planners. Language acquisition and development is too complex to be adquately described by labels

such as limited, functional and proficient as would be derived from holistic scoring and grading of entire discourse samples.

3. *"Differentiating Between Types of Scores."* In scoring a discourse sample we have to recognize that some indicators of proficiency that might be scored are one-directional in that students who perform consistently well might be inferred to have mastery of that competency but that those who did not cannot be assumed to lack the skill. This would be especially true of conversational management strategies and topic elaboration. (Various types of scoring derived from competency testing are discussed by Messick, 1981.) There also appears to be a need for scores in some areas, use of complex syntax, that would give the student credit for premastery stages of acquisition. Further, as the performance of students regarding certain aspects of discourse may be inconsistent and even students generally low in overall proficiency may display a competency once there is a need to depict frequency or how the student characteristically performs.

4. *"Reliability of Scoring."* It is necessary that any aspect of discourse upon which proficiency is evaluated receive the same score from multiple evaluators. Holistic scoring of writing samples has been shown to be reliable. In selecting those discourse variables to be included for scoring in assessment only those for which high reliability can be established will be included. It would appear that there is a higher probability that certain discourse or interactional competencies that appear on tapes would be more easily discernable and hense reliably scored than others. For instance, deciding on such features as whether a student has elaborated on topics, provided background information, negotiated a misunderstanding and/or developed a narrative containing complex semantic relations seems an easier and hence more promising candidates for a reliable scoring system than does decisions regarding originality in narratives. Another problem in establishing reliability will occur in marking continuous scores, e.g. "Characteristically," "Sometimes," "Seldom" or "Never" generalizing about the whole discourse sample for a task. An important question for consideration by policymakers is:"Are the more easily scored discourse elements in terms of time and reliability, e.g. certain syntactical features, as important in terms of sociolinguistic sensitivity to the language competencies of linguistic minority students as other more complex aspects of discourse, e.g. varying verb tense for highlighting foreground from background information?" For those who feel the sociolinguistic approach is the best alternative for language proficiency assessment the bottom line will be whether a reliable and practical scoring method can be developed which incorporates enough features of discourse competencies to be a viable measure of the approach and whether

evaluations of elicited discourse generalize to students' communicative competencies observed in other relevant contexts.

Advantages and Disadvantages

In summary, the advantage of this approach to language proficiency assessment is that it measures language in one context in which it is used. It is an approach that can be used with students at various stages of language acquisition and attempts to provide an optimal setting for linguistic minority students to display optimal performance. Skills learned by teachers regarding the elicitation and analysis of discourse are potentially relevant to adult interaction with students in other contexts such as the classroom.

Disadvantages of the approach are that much research remains to be done because it is a new type of measurement, examiners and discourse analysts must be thoroughly trained to a level of 'clinical' skills, methods of scoring and providing feedback to classroom teachers need to be established and the method is more time consuming than other testing approaches.

Need for Future Research

The need for further research was implied in the limitations and other sections of this report. Directions for future research and expansions of this present study are suggested below:

1. There is a need to compare evaluations of language proficiency based on elicited discourse samples to discourse observed in more naturalistic settings. For instance, teacher ratings and observations of student discourse could be compared with LPM results. Naturally occuring narratives could be compared with elicited narratives. Elaboration during play or in classroom discourse could be compared to that in the elicitations.

2. There is a need to explore the relationship between achievement and language proficiency in bilingual children.

3. There is a need to explore more fully the range of proficiency in both Spanish and English. We would especially recommend that the range of proficiencies of a larger group of students, e.g. 25, from limited to proficient in English, all of whom are proficient in Spanish be studied, holding age and grade level

constant, to better understand the acquisition of English for children coming to school monolingual in Spanish or bilingual.

4. In our own data, further research could be done comparing proficiencies across tasks and languages for individual bilingual students to more fully specify similarities or differences in their acquisition of discourse strategies in Spanish and English.

5. We have not discussed in any detail how the material in this report is to be used in practice in making decisions about placement and for developing instructional programs for linguistic minority students. We feel that this approach to conceptualizing language proficiency under the broader construct of communicative competency holds promise in the development of more successful programs. We plan to include recommendations about this in future work some of which, however, require verification through ethnographic observations outside of the assessment context. Briefly, we feel that overall, the language assessment procedures undertaken by the school district and the research team, involving relatively large numbers of teachers, researchers and teacher-researcher collaborators in the development of more appropriate language proficiency measures was valuable in developing greater awareness about what is involved in being communicatively competent, and also about contexts that promote or retard the linguistic minority child's language development. In traditional language proficiency approaches, contextual variables are hidden from view and consequently ignored. Therefore an extremely important variable influencing language performance, that of context, is ignored not only in judgments of language proficiency but also in educational programs designed to meet the needs of linguistic minority students. An important aspect of a socio-linguistic discourse approach to language proficiency assessment is its insistance on paying attention to context. We have found in our work with teachers and in presentations at educational conferences for nonspecialists that there is little awareness of socio-linguistics and discourse analysis in the field of education. We feel this approach is a potentially valuable and, as yet, untapped source of knowledge for teacher training and development. Further, we feel that future research will indicate a clear relationship between the development of more autonomous oral proficiencies and literacy, a relationship that has recently been seen in the work of King and Rentel (1981) and Sulzby (1981).

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